

**1989**

# **Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals**

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## The Revolutions of 1989:

### Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy

*Many journalists and scholars will look for the correlation of that chain of spectacular transformations that changed, as if at one blow, the fates of tens of millions of individuals and the hitherto firm bipolar picture of the modern world.... Today, many people are talking and writing about the role of the intellectuals, students, and the theatre, or the influence of the Soviets' perestroika, and economic difficulties. They're right. I myself as a playwright would also add the influence of humour and honesty, and perhaps even something beyond us, something maybe even unearthly.*

Václav Havel

## 1989 and the Sense of an Ending

Everyone in the West was clear about two things concerning the events of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe. One was that there had been a revolution (or revolutions). The other was that 1989 spelled the end of several major projects in modern European history. No one seemed capable of escaping an eschatological solemnity.

About revolutions we shall speak in a moment. But what were these things that were ending? First, and most obvious, was socialism; Right, Left, and Center, whatever conclusions they derived from the fact, were agreed on that. "Less than seventy-five years after it officially began," affirmed Robert Heilbroner, "the contest between capitalism and socialism is over: capitalism has won."<sup>1</sup> "Socialism is dead," agreed Ralf Dahrendorf, echoing a hundred pronouncements of a like kind; and, just in case an

alternative terminology might be brought in to dispute the point, he added for good measure: “Communism is gone, never to return.”<sup>2</sup>

There were, indeed, those who seemed self-consciously restrictive in their claims, though agreeing on the main point. “This was the year communism in Eastern Europe died,” said Timothy Garton Ash, probably the best-known commentator in the English-speaking world on the events of 1989.<sup>3</sup> But most commentators, although recognizing the varieties of socialism, were disinclined to let this modify their verdicts. One might indeed separate (Western) “democratic” socialism from (Eastern) “state” socialism or communism, but, argued William Rees-Mogg, “Both types of socialist systems have failed.”<sup>4</sup>

It is not surprising to hear these assessments from the conservative Right and the liberal Center of the political spectrum. The events of 1989 were evidently a greater challenge to the Left. All the more remarkable, then, that they, too, accepted the general verdict, and often in terms strikingly similar to those used by the Right and the Center. What we were seeing, said the left-wing historian and long-standing Communist Party member Eric Hobsbawm, was not just the crisis of communism, but “its end. Those of us who believed that the October Revolution was the gate to the future of world history have been shown to be wrong.”<sup>5</sup> All over Western Europe erstwhile communist parties, following the example of their counterparts in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, have hurried to throw off the “communism” of their titles. Sometimes, as in the case of the Italian Communist Party, they have not even been able to swallow “socialism” as a substitute: the Italian CP, after agonizing months during which it was simply referred to as “*la cosa*” (“the thing”), settled tentatively for “the Democratic Party of the Left” (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*).<sup>6</sup>

Even where the old names remain, there have been some extraordinary turnabouts and transformations of policy. Introducing the *Manifesto for New Times* to the Forty-first Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Martin Jacques, editor of the party’s theoretical journal *Marxism Today*, was comprehensive in his dismissal of traditional aims: “It is the end of the road for the communist system. Stalinism is dead and Leninism has had its day. We are witnessing the defeat of socialism.”<sup>7</sup> *Marxism Today* itself, under Jacques’s editorship, presided over a far-reaching revision of traditional Marxist thought.

It proclaimed “New Times,” an era of post-industrial, “post-Fordist” capitalism in which almost all of Marx’s original diagnoses and prognoses had to be discarded. In its place were such concepts as “socialist individualism” and talk of “a new socialist morality of enterprise, individual responsibility and initiative.”<sup>8</sup> The *Manifesto for New Times* embodied the new thinking; it was adopted as official party policy in 1989. The word *socialism* evidently remained; but what of the thing? What content did it still have, and how did that relate to socialist philosophy in any of its traditional senses?

With the presumed death of socialism has been coupled the death of another of the great projects of modernity: the quest for utopia. Utopia was always a figurative thing. No one, or almost no one, expected to realize in practice More’s *Utopia* or Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, let alone copy the ways of the noble Houyhnhnms of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. But the Utopian ideal represented a striving for perfection that found its ways into countless schemes for the reorganization and regeneration of society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among these schemes was socialism. Despite the energetic attempts by Marx and Engels to repudiate the Utopian label, it has been clear to most thinkers that socialism embodied one of the grandest utopias of modern times. Socialism has been, indeed, according to Zygmunt Bauman, “the utopia of the modern epoch.”<sup>9</sup> All other utopias have either been marginalized or absorbed by it.

If in our time utopia has been socialism, then the death of socialism must also spell the death of utopia. “With the fall of communist regimes in so many countries of Eastern Europe,” says Wolf Lepenies, “the utopia of socialism has died as well.”<sup>10</sup> “The catastrophe of historical communism,” says Norberto Bobbio, signifies that “in a seemingly irreversible way, the greatest political utopia in history ... has been completely upturned into its exact opposite.”<sup>11</sup> But the death of utopia goes beyond the fate of any particular social philosophy. It has been seen as the final repudiation of all secular creeds, all modern ideologies that put their faith in history and the historical process. “The 1980s,” says Gareth Stedman Jones, “have brought to an end ... all lingering beliefs in the historical promise of secular utopias.” The collapse of communism, “the most concentrated expression of that faith,” has also undermined “the props upon which that faith relied, the secular scientific inquiry into Man.”<sup>12</sup> The chain of causation has

expanded relentlessly: the death of socialism has led to the demise of utopia, which, in turn, has dissolved the belief in science and secularism.

Tying socialism to utopia, considering socialism as a utopia, is all the more important for the vehement rejection of utopia and Utopian politics by many of the leading spokesmen of the new order in Central and Eastern Europe. For many years this has been one of the principal themes of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's utterances, especially since his exile to the West in 1974. In the new climate of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Solzhenitsyn has seen fit to renew his charges against the Soviet Union and its reigning ideology. In a tract entitled "How We Are to Rebuild Russia"—published not in the West, but in the Moscow daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the organ of the Communist Youth League, with a circulation of 22 million—he urged a return to the days and ways of Russia before 1917, to the values of the old rural society and to some of its political institutions, such as the *zemstva*. What must be decisively abandoned, he said, was the hubris of Utopian politics: "For 70 years ... we have been hitched to the Marxist-Leninist utopia, which was blind and evil at birth."<sup>13</sup>

Solzhenitsyn may have sounded extreme. He had, in the eyes of some commentators, come to appear almost a throwback to the "Old Believers," a Slavophile preaching the revival of the peasant community under the stern guidance of a purified Orthodoxy (he has often expressed his contempt for the Russian Orthodox Church under communism, "a church ruled by atheists"). But not only were his views not so very different from much of what was being said in Russia after the revolutions, we find gentler echoes of them in the writings of many prominent East European intellectuals, formerly in opposition or exile and now, in several cases, in charge of the destinies of their countries. Especially strong are the echoes of Solzhenitsyn's antiutopianism.

Václav Havel, in an address of 1984, saluted "the author of *The Gulag Archipelago*" not just for the courage of his stand against the Soviet authorities, but also for the terms in which it was made. Solzhenitsyn opposed "personal experience and the natural world" to impersonal, "objective" bureaucratic power, and so unmasked its guilt. Havel, too, inveighed against the tyranny of the scientific or positivistic worldview, and mourned the

“tens of thousand of lives ... sacrificed on the altar of a scientific Utopia about brighter tomorrows.”<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere Havel has shown that he is aware of the appeal, even the necessity, of utopia. He has said that “visions of a better world and dreams about it” supply that “transcendence of the given” without which human life loses all meaning and dignity. But utopia is only too prone to degeneration and petrification. The living idea becomes a set of techniques that do violence to life. Utopia is easily hijacked by what Havel calls “the fanatic of the abstract project, the practising Utopian”—the Marats, Robespierres, Lenins, Pol Pots (“I would not include Hitler and Stalin in this category; if I did, it would have to include every criminal”).<sup>15</sup>

Havel lamented his country’s “postwar lapse into Utopianism” of the Leninist-Stalinist variety. His country had paid a cruel price for it. But, as an antidote to the Utopian poison, he was glad to be able to invoke “a distinctive central European scepticism” formed out of the bruising historical experience of that region of Europe. Czechoslovakia’s experience of utopianism, he said, has resulted in “a new and far-reaching reinforcement of our central European scepticism about Utopianism of all colors and shadings, about the slightest suggestion of Utopianism.” The central European mind—“sceptical, sober, anti-Utopian”—offers the resources of hope. It can become the basis for the construction of an “anti-political politics,” a “politics outside politics.” This Havel presented as a counter to the systematizers, the fanatics, the technicians of power—in a word, the Utopians. It was offered as a political philosophy for the emerging post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>16</sup>

I shall return to this “anti-political politics.” It is, it seems to me, of considerable importance in understanding the political predicament of East European societies today. But first there is one further apocalyptic pronouncement, perhaps the most arresting, to consider. It is that with the revolutions of 1989 we witnessed “the end of history,” no less.

This was the title of an article published in 1989 by Francis Fukuyama, by his own account “a relatively junior official” of the U.S. State Department. To his evident surprise, not only was the article widely noted, but it aroused considerable controversy in

America and Europe. Everyone, from William F. Buckley, Margaret Thatcher, and *Encounter* on the Right to *The Nation*, *Marxism Today*, and Mikhail Gorbachev on the Left, rushed to ridicule the idea that “history had ended.” As Fukuyama wryly noted, he had come to think that his true accomplishment was to achieve “a uniquely universal consensus, not on the current status of liberalism”—the subject of the article—“but on the fact that I was wrong.”<sup>17</sup>

The reason behind both the interest and the outrage that greeted Fukuyama’s article is not hard to find. Fukuyama was saying what many people were thinking, and were indeed themselves uttering in their different ways; but he used a tone and a set of concepts that many found unsettling and in some ways offensive. It is not common to find a State Department official deploying Hegelian concepts and arguments. That is what Fukuyama did.

Fukuyama drew upon Alexandre Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind* to argue that Hegel’s view of mankind’s history had been proved essentially correct. The events of 1989 demonstrated more effectively than ever before that history, understood as the history of thought, of contending ideas about the fundamental principles of government and society, had indeed come to an end. Hegel had been right to think that Napoleon’s defeat of the Prussian monarchy at the Battle of Jena in 1806 marked the end of history, because it symbolized the victory of the ideals of the French Revolution and their embodiment in the “universal homogenous state” (*sic* Fukuyama), the state based on liberty and equality. Much remained, of course, to be done in the further diffusion of these ideals and their actual implementation in the institutions of different states over the face of the earth. That had been the achievement of the subsequent two centuries, accompanied by the frightful stresses of social revolution, two world wars, and the ultimately unsuccessful challenges of fascism and communism.

But now, at the end of the twentieth century, there can be no doubt about the truth of Hegel’s insight. What we are witnessing, said Fukuyama, is not simply the end of the Cold War or of a particular period of postwar history, but “the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” The detours and regressions

of the last two centuries have finally proved to be just that: not real alternatives, but the growing pains of world liberal society, the society inaugurated by the American and French Revolutions. As Fukuyama said, “The century that began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an “end of ideology” or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.”<sup>18</sup>

It is unnecessary to speak of the misunderstandings and simplifications to be found in most of Fukuyama’s critics. He did not say that there would be an end of conflict, nor of what most people understand as history, history as events. There is room enough in his account of the future for severe struggles, even wars, springing from nationalism, racism, and ethnic rivalries. He was aware of the scale of environmental destruction and the enormous problems this poses for the whole world. What he insisted was that none of these involve massive ideological conflicts—history as the clash of ideas—of the kind that have marked past epochs. “To refute my hypothesis,” he wrote in reply to his critics, “it is not sufficient to suggest that the future holds in store large and momentous events. One would have to show that these events were driven by a systematic idea of political and social justice that claimed to supersede liberalism.”<sup>19</sup>

It has to be said that very few of Fukuyama’s many critics have so far met the challenge. Indeed, despite a frequently arrogant and sneering tone,<sup>20</sup> what is more striking is the degree of coincidence between their views and his. We have seen this already in the many expressions of “the death of socialism,” which are usually accompanied, explicitly or implicitly, by an acknowledgment of the victory of capitalism, or of the market, or of liberalism. Ralf Dahrendorf’s argument that 1989 represented the triumph of the “open society” seems no different in kind, despite his attempt to distinguish the open society from the social system of capitalism, as well as all other “systems.”<sup>21</sup> In theory it may be possible to construct an abstract model of an open society unrelated to historic capitalism; in actual fact, all “open societies”—Dahrendorf’s examples include Britain, France, postwar Germany, and the United States—have evolved along with the evolution of liberal capitalist systems. Dahrendorf caviled at Hayek’s—and Fukuyama’s—equation of the open society with market society. Economic liberalism, it is true, is not the same

thing as political liberalism, nor need it entail such liberalism. But there seems to be no example of a society that is politically liberal that is not at the same time characterized by economic liberalism. A degree of reciprocity, if not of dependence, seems clear. Capitalism without liberal democracy is not uncommon (if not very efficient). Liberal democracy without capitalism is so rare that no case springs to mind.<sup>22</sup>

It may also be true to say, as did Gareth Stedman Jones, that “the present global triumph of liberal capitalism” will not necessarily be permanent or even long-lasting, and that “it says more about the weakness and exhaustion of the historical alternatives offered than about the intrinsic strength of liberal capitalism itself.”<sup>23</sup> There are certainly some serious objections to be made to Fukuyama’s thesis on the score of the apparently irreversible victory of liberal capitalism (though not, as is sometimes done, on the grounds of his apparent blindness to the moral and spiritual shortcomings of liberal individualism).<sup>24</sup> The real problem, though, as Fukuyama noted, is precisely “the weakness and exhaustion of the historical alternatives” with what are offered as real ideological rivals to liberal capitalism today. Here there seems to have been a marked reluctance or inability on the part of his critics to come up with anything. Dahrendorf, for instance, in searching for the intellectual antecedents of the open society, fell back upon the very eighteenth-century thinkers—Hume, Locke, Kant, Burke, the American authors of the *Federalist Papers*—who are invoked by the devotees of liberal capitalism, such as Hayek.<sup>25</sup> Eric Hobsbawm mocked Fukuyama for his shortsightedness in expecting that “henceforth all would be plain liberal, free-market sailing.” But he, too, admitted that “for the time being there is no part of the world that credibly represents an alternative system to capitalism.”<sup>26</sup> Fukuyama has clearly provoked irritation and anger; but it is equally clear that his critics have found it extremely hard to avoid mimicking him, whatever the difference of terms.

Jürgen Habermas remarked about a “peculiar characteristic” of the 1989 revolution, “namely its total lack of ideas that are either innovative or orientated towards the future.”<sup>27</sup> François Furet, too, said that “with all the fuss and noise, not a single new idea has come out of Eastern Europe in 1989.” He further observed that, for the first time in 150 years, no alternative total view of society was on offer in the intellectual and political battles of the world.<sup>28</sup> For Eric Hobsbawm, too, this was the predicament posed by the events of 1989. He argued that many of the gains in Western capitalist democracies—the

welfare state, a secure place for labor organizations, Keynesian policies to combat unemployment—were “the result of fear”: that is, they were the consequence of the ruling elites’ fear of the appeal of the alternative presented, in however corrupt a form, in Eastern Europe. “Whatever Stalin did to the Russians,” Hobsbawm noted, “he was good for the common people of the West.” With the loss of that alternative, the rich and powerful need no longer concern themselves with the common people. They can allow welfare to erode and the protection of those who need it to atrophy. “This is the chief effect of the disappearance of even a very bad socialist region from the globe,” according to Hobsbawm.<sup>29</sup>

There was evidently something strange about the revolution of 1989. It seems to have been peculiarly uncreative, unfertile in ideas. Rather than—as in 1776, 1789, 1848, and 1917—confronting the world with a grand alternative, a new set of values and practices to live by, it seems to have regarded as its main task the suppression of alternatives. If it paid tribute to any new ideas, it was to the postmodernist perception of the end of “metanarratives,” the impossibility now of conceptualizing our reality according to any comprehensive scheme of history and society, such as Marxism or positivism (or, for that matter, liberalism in its more normative varieties).<sup>30</sup>

Is this then our condition—or our predicament? The breakup of the competing models of society that have been the dynamic of world history in the last two centuries? The end of the “global civil war”? Not “Three Worlds,” but only One World?<sup>31</sup> A sort of global entropy of ideas, a final end of all ideologies (for an ideology without opposition is no ideology)? There may not be much to celebrate in this, for, in Hegel’s famous expression, “when philosophy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old.”<sup>32</sup> But before we assess these and other apocalyptic utterances, we need to look a little more closely at the events of 1989 themselves.

## **The Revolution of 1989**

Almost everyone, observers as much as participants, seems inclined to call the events of 1989 a revolution, and this is not the place to quibble about that.<sup>33</sup> Definitions of revolution are notoriously controversial, but there is at least a reasonable degree of

agreement on the idea of varieties of revolution. Let us, then, accept for now (time has a way of altering these contemporary verdicts) that 1989 was a variety of revolution.<sup>34</sup> What kind of revolution was it? How are we best to understand it?

One way of understanding is by analogy. All revolutions since the French have in part looked back, seeking to connect their own revolutionary moment with those of past revolutions. They have invited comparisons with past revolutions both in terms of continuities and of declared departures from them. Lenin was fond of claiming the kinship between the French and Russian Revolutions, even though the whole point of the Russian Revolution was to go beyond the bourgeois achievements of the French. Revolutionaries are the most traditionminded of political actors, even as they announce their aim of renewing the world.

The revolution of 1989 has, as we have noted, so far been unusually cautious in its claims. The “pathos of novelty” that Hannah Arendt saw as the hallmark of modern revolution has been conspicuously absent. Far from it, the revolution of 1989 has displayed something like nostalgia for the achievements of past revolutions. It did not wish to go forward; it wished to go back. Not back to 1917, of course, that was, in its eyes, the great error, the beginning of the great catastrophe,<sup>35</sup> but back to 1848, back to 1789 and 1776 (invocations of 1688, the British “Glorious Revolution,” have so far not been heard, but there is still time, and, what with talk of monarchical restoration in some places, such as Romania, may not appear so absurd).

Habermas referred to the events of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe—leaving out the Soviet Union as a different case—as a “rectifying revolution.” He said that the revolution of 1989 “presents itself as a revolution that is to some degree flowing backwards, one that clears the ground in order to catch up with developments previously missed out.” Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria—the countries that, unlike Russia, had socialism imposed on them by military force from outside—all showed the desire to return to old symbols of nationhood and to restore, where possible, the political traditions and party organization of the interwar years. The idea of “rectification” also works at a deeper and more fundamental level, stretching further back into the historical past. It is in these countries that one sees the clearest signs of the wish,

as Habermas put it, “to connect up constitutionally with the inheritance of the bourgeois revolutions, and socially and politically with the styles of commerce and life associated with developed capitalism, particularly that of the European Community.”<sup>36</sup>

The revolution of 1789, the classic “bourgeois revolution,” is therefore one obvious point of reference for the 1989 revolution. This is so, first, in terms of its aims, taken in the broadest sense as encompassing many of the radical demands of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Locke and Shaftesbury, Hume and Smith, Kant and Montesquieu, the American Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution, liberty and equality, the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, constitutionalism and popular sovereignty: these names and themes would seem to express as compellingly in 1989 as in 1789 the aspirations of the revolutionaries.

The “return of 1789” has been hailed as one of the more extraordinary consequences of the revolution of 1989 in Eastern Europe. The revolution of 1989 has in particular reflected sternly on the claims of the revolution of 1917 that it was the real revolution, the universal revolution going beyond the “bourgeois” limits of the revolution of 1789. The reverse, declares François Furet, now seems to be the case:

The universal character of the principles of 1789 seems truer than ever before.... The Bolsheviks thought that with 1917 they had buried 1789. Here, at the end of our century, we see that the opposite is happening. It is 1917 that is being buried in the name of 1789. This extraordinary reversal, unpredictable and unforeseen, imbues the famous principles of 1789 with a certain freshness and with renewed universality. As we begin to close the long and tragic digression that was the Communist illusion, we find ourselves more than ever confronted by the great dilemmas of democracy as they appeared at the end of the 18th century, expressed by ideas and by the course of the French Revolution.<sup>37</sup>

1789 also seems relevant in terms of the manner of revolution, how it begins and how it proceeds. Here the most significant thing is the role of the people. The mass movement of Solidarity, the scenes of mass protest in Budapest, Prague, Leipzig, and Timisoara—all

these readily bring to mind the classic explosions of popular protest and action in the early phases of the French Revolution: the storming of the Bastille, the march on Versailles, the invasion of the Tuilleries.

For those such as Habermas who see 1989 in terms of “spontaneous mass action,” the parallel with 1789 is practically irresistible. Habermas has employed Lenin’s famous formulation: in 1989 as in 1789, revolution broke out because those below were no longer willing, and those above were no longer able, to go on in the old way: “The presence of large masses gathering in squares and mobilizing on the streets managed, astoundingly, to disempower a regime that was armed to the teeth.”<sup>38</sup> These were techniques, Habermas further points out, that, like the goals, were of the most traditional kind: “The recent rectifying revolutions took their methods and standards entirely from the familiar repertoire of the modern age.” It is this that makes untenable “postmodernist” interpretations of the revolution of 1989, which would see it as a revolution that aimed to go “beyond reason,” to the release of “self-empowering subjectivity.” 1989, on the contrary, showed itself as belonging squarely to the age of modernity launched by the Enlightenment and the eighteenth-century revolution.<sup>39</sup> It spoke the language of 1789 and employed many of its methods. Since these were the elements that in the nineteenth century came to constitute the classic model of the liberal-democratic revolution, 1989 has to be seen as continuing rather than surpassing the modern revolutionary tradition.

So much can be granted while not stilling doubts about the appropriateness of the parallel with 1789. The drawbacks are fairly obvious. The men and women of 1989 were liberals and democrats, but they were also—or saw themselves as—victims of ideological politics. The French Revolution was conceived in liberty but, as almost everyone from Edmund Burke onward was at pains to point out, it gave birth to despotism. Under “the tyranny of the idea” it moved inexorably to the Terror, war, and dictatorship. Havel, we may remember, instanced Marat and Robespierre as the very type of the “practising Utopians” that had to be fought against. However much 1989 may owe to 1789—and the legacy is undeniable—the violence of the course of the French Revolution and the methods it used to overcome its opponents are bound to make that revolution suspect in the eyes of 1989 liberals.

There is a further problem with seeing the revolution of 1789 as parallel to that of 1989. If that view is meant to suggest that the revolution used as its model a revolution of popular mass insurrection, it is seriously misleading as to the causes of the revolution (or revolutions) of 1989. It is, of course, also true that the old view of the French Revolution, as a mass rising of an oppressed populace, is no longer held by most contemporary historians. Tocqueville's "revisionist" analysis, stressing the role of a reforming monarchy and an "enlightened" nobility, has become the starting point for practically all historians of the Revolution.<sup>40</sup> But there is no doubt that, from the point of view of popular perceptions and even of its general place in the revolutionary tradition, 1789 has become associated with mass movements and popular uprising. The iconography of that Revolution—the poetry of Wordsworth and Shelley, the paintings of David, the prints of the great revolutionary festivals—has mythologized indelibly the heroic portrait of the *sansculottes*, the common people who, singing the *Marseillaise*, swept away almost miraculously the reactionary armies of kings and emperors.<sup>41</sup> It was from the French Revolution, with its myth of *le peuple* as the sovereign force, that Trotsky derived his defining principle of revolution: "The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events."<sup>42</sup>

There is no reason to doubt the importance of popular pressure in 1989 any more than in 1789. The problem of how to view the revolution of 1989 has to do not with the popular desire for change nor with the eagerness with which opportunities were seized when they were offered, but with the astonishingly rapid success of the revolution. The regimes of Central and Eastern Europe crumbled faster than anyone had imagined—or dared hope. Commentators found themselves rewriting their books before the ink was dry on the copy for the first edition. What brought about, in the space of a few months, so spectacular a collapse of anciens régimes?

There has always been a problem with Lenin's formulation—often repeated, as by Habermas—that revolutions break out when the lower classes will not, and the upper classes cannot, continue the old order. Apart from the suspicion of tautology, which is rife in any case in most etiologies of revolution, there is too symmetrical a balance between the "will not" of the lower classes and the "cannot" of the upper classes as reciprocal but independent variables. Is it not the case, rather, that it is only when the

upper classes cannot maintain the old order that we find clear evidence of the determination of the lower classes to end it? Does this not suggest that causal priority has to be assigned to the problems of the existing power structure and the existing power holders in society—that is, to the distemper at the top rather than at the bottom of society? Discontent, latent or manifest, among the lower classes can be taken as more or less given with regard to most stratified social orders. Regimes can be peppered with popular rebellions without succumbing to them, despite these expressions of manifest disaffection on the part of the people. This was the case with the majority of the agrarian empires of the preindustrial world.

It is only when the ruling structures of society are in a clear state of decay or dissolution that popular discontent can express itself in a confident way. Then we usually find spokesmen from the upper classes urging on popular feeling against the regime. Revolutionaries, often released from prison or returned from exile abroad, busy themselves with organizing the mass discontent. After the success of the revolution the idea of a popular uprising against a hated tyranny becomes the official myth of the new regime. This conceals the fact that the old regime died, often by its own hand, rather than been overthrown in a popular outburst of indignation. When E. H. Carr wrote of the October 1917 revolution that “Bolshevism succeeded to a vacant throne,” he was pointing to the “negligible” contribution of Lenin and the Bolsheviks to the overthrow of czarism. But he could just as easily have been referring to what Auguste Blanqui called the “happy surprise” of revolutionaries everywhere at finding that the main work of destruction had already been done by some of the most distinguished and powerful representatives of the ancien régime.<sup>43</sup>

In book 8 of *The Republic* Plato observed that “in any form of government revolution always starts from the outbreak of internal dissension in the ruling class. The constitution cannot be upset so long as that class is of one mind, however small it may be.”<sup>44</sup> This statement may need some qualification, but its essential truth stands up remarkably well. Was that not shown, as well as anywhere, in the revolutions of 1989? No one has doubted the widespread feeling of discontent, even despair, among the populations of East European societies for many decades. The evidence has been plain to see, not the least in the revolts or urgent attempts at reform in East Germany in 1953, in Hungary and Poland

in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and in Poland again in 1980. All were suppressed, sometimes brutally. After the suppression of Solidarity in 1981, many observers predicted a long period of resentful quiescence in the countries of the Soviet bloc.

They were wrong. In the second half of the 1980s first Poland, then with gathering speed other communist societies, began to reform. Reform turned, in the space of a few breathless months in 1989, into revolution. How was that possible? Popular rebellions had repeatedly failed. Liberal attempts at reform had been crushed. The dissident intelligentsia was largely impotent. Why did change finally occur at that time—and change on a scale scarcely dreamed of by even the most hopeful reformer?

The answer, in a word, is as banal as it is inevitable: Gorbachev. Gorbachev was replaying Khrushchev with a vengeance. Just as the latter's denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 sparked the Hungarian and Polish uprisings of that year, so the former's unleashing of the forces of *glasnost* and *perestroika* sparked the revolutions of 1989.

“Gorbachev,” of course, stood for many things. He was the leader of the reform movement launched by Yuri Andropov in the early 1980s. He expressed the Soviet Union's urgent recognition that it was slipping desperately behind the West in its industrial progress. He was part of that widespread liberalization of opinion in the Soviet Union that acknowledged that, although a command economy may work well enough for the early stages of industrialization, it is ill equipped to deal with the later, more sophisticated stages. He accepted, equally, the view of most educated people in the Soviet Union that pluralism in the economy must go hand in hand with pluralism in the polity, that a market economy, even a “social market” economy, requires a liberal state. He was also, it appears, a sincere man, genuinely committed to reform in the interests of the Soviet people and nation, knowing that it would take time but also that time was what he did not have. He was, or represented, no doubt, much more. To show all of that, one would have to examine in detail the developments in the Soviet Union at the time of Gorbachev. This is not the place to attempt such a thing.<sup>45</sup>

In any event, Gorbachev stood for the Soviet Union in the age of the global economy and the information society. National autarky is no longer feasible; in the satellite age

populations cannot be insulated and cordoned off from images and ideas that flood the world. The Soviet Union had to change; and in changing it brought about the downfall of the regimes of its client states all over Central and Eastern Europe. This is where Gorbachev supplied the necessary condition for revolution as specified by Plato. The Soviet Union had been at the apex of the power structure of the East European states. So long as its party and army supported the rulers of those states, they were safe from popular uprisings and able to handle the radicals within their own ranks. Once that support was withdrawn, the ruling elites were deprived of that legitimacy and, more critically, that ability to use force that had been the mainstay of their power. Their regimes collapsed like a house of cards.

Nothing demonstrates the truth of this more clearly than the fate of the revolution in Romania. Why was this the country where the change was accompanied by the greatest bloodshed? Surely because this was the one country where the ruling party did not depend on Soviet troops for its power.<sup>46</sup> The policies of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceausescu had led to Romania's growing independence of the Soviet Union and its increasingly friendly relations with China and the West. No Warsaw Pact troops had been allowed on Romanian soil since 1962. Ceausescu condemned the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and refused to participate in it.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, when protest erupted in Timisoara and Bucharest there was not—as in other East European countries—a restraining Soviet hand laid on the military and the police. Hence the bloodiness of the ensuing conflict between the people and the Securitate.

Even in the case of Romania, though, we must be careful not to see the revolution too exclusively in terms of a people's uprising. There is evidence of a coup against Ceausescu long planned from within the Romanian Communist Party. The plot involved top-ranking Party officials, army units, many generals, and a section of the Securitate secret police. When the army swung to the side of the people during the uprising, this was not, as has been generally put about in Romania and the West, a spontaneous conversion under popular stimulus, but the result of the plotters' work within the army.<sup>48</sup> The Romanian revolution, therefore, like all revolutions, had as much the character of the classic *fronde* as of a people's revolution.<sup>49</sup>

In the remainder of Eastern Europe *fronde-like* features, such as a divided and weakened ruling class, were so obvious that they scarcely need to be documented. By confining Soviet troops to their barracks and proclaiming an attitude of “benevolent neutrality,” Gorbachev effectively disarmed the rulers of the East European states. There was to be no repeat of 1956, 1968, and 1981. In December 1956, when the leaders of the workers’ councils told János Kádár that they had the Hungarian people behind them, he replied that he had the Soviet tanks behind him. In 1989 that was no longer true for the majority of the leaders in Eastern Europe.

Neither the Soviet government nor the reformers, it is true, expected the complete collapse of one-party communist rule. The Soviet leadership, largely through the agency of the KGB, was active in promoting opposition to the East European conservatives.<sup>50</sup> But it did not aim to undermine the power of the communist parties; it merely aimed to reform them. The institution of “socialism with a human face” was the limited intent, as in the Soviet Union itself. However, once started, events were difficult to stop. The reform movement, fueled by popular feeling, developed into a revolutionary torrent that swept away the one-party state.

The Soviet government acquiesced. It would do nothing to save the ruling parties. In 1989 the Soviet Union made it clear that it had decisively abandoned the Brezhnev doctrine of the priority of “proletarian internationalism” over the particular interests and wishes of individual socialist states. Already in 1987 Gorbachev had announced, “The time of the Communist International ... is over.... All parties are completely and irreversibly independent.” In May 1989 Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze said he could imagine no occasion on which Soviet troops might intervene in a Warsaw Pact country. At the Warsaw Pact meeting in Bucharest in July 1989 Ceausescu, supported by Erich Honecker, reversed his stance in 1968 and called for armed intervention against the Solidarity government in Poland. The Soviet Union’s opposition was decisive. As if to set the seal on this rejection of the past, the Warsaw Pact meeting in December 1989 unequivocally denounced the suppression of the Prague Spring of 1968, a resolution endorsed by the Supreme Soviet in the same month.<sup>51</sup> The Brezhnev doctrine was buried. In its place Gorbachev proclaimed what his spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov called “the Sinatra doctrine”: let every nation do it in its own way.

The revolution of 1989, then, for all the homage it may have paid to that of 1789, departed from the perceived model of that revolution in several important ways. It was not a revolution that can be considered primarily in terms of the interaction of internal forces.<sup>52</sup> It was not a case of an isolated revolutionary bastion standing embattled against an array of enemies (Russia in 1917 is a better parallel with France in 1789 in that respect). It was not an ideological revolution— not, at least, in the sense of a revolution that aimed to transform the world in accordance with the logic of a new, dominating, idea. Ideas are important, but those that spurred 1989 are old ideas. 1989 did not want to invent anything new. It had had enough of novelties. Indeed, it attempted to recover an older, pre-1789, meaning of revolution: the seventeenth-century understanding of revolution as restoration, as when Clarendon termed the restoration of Charles II in 1660 a “revolution” or Locke saw the 1688 revolution as the restitution of rights usurped by James II.<sup>53</sup>

If 1989 was not parallel to 1789 or 1917, was it parallel to 1848? For several observers, 1848, “the springtime of nations,” offers a better vantage point from which to consider the events of 1989.<sup>54</sup> For one thing, looking forward from 1848 allows us to speak of revolutions, rather than simply revolution, and to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the changes in the different countries of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, in both 1848 and 1989 there was the same phenomenon of the “chain reaction” of revolutions, a revolutionary contagion spreading across the whole region. In both cases, too, a key role was played by the flanking superpowers—in Russia’s case, the same superpower—in the sequence of events.

Then there is the fact that 1989, like 1848, erupted after nearly forty years of peace and prosperity (though there were growing signs of economic distress). In both cases, too, the revolutions were remarkably peaceful, at least in the early stages (Romania was the obvious exception). In 1848 as in 1989, rulers ceded their thrones almost without a shot’s being fired. In both cases they lost their nerve, along with their belief in their right to rule.

More significantly, 1989 was, like 1848, a “revolution of the intellectuals,” though not necessarily of the ideologues. It was led by poets, playwrights, musicians, philosophers, journalists, and university professors.<sup>55</sup> “Truth shall prevail” was the motto of 1989. But

this was not an ideological slogan, not one that proclaimed that truth had been discovered and only needed to be applied. The revolutions of 1989 and 1848 alike were led by liberals who were fearful of the “democratic despotism” that had befallen the 1789 revolution. Ideology, they were acutely aware, could compromise liberty. For similar reasons, both in 1989 and 1848 there was a fear that the “social question”—the consequences of rapid economic change—could derail the political settlement that was the prime aim of the revolution.

There are further illuminating parallels between the two revolutions. 1848 threw up questions of nationality and of class that returned to haunt the victors of 1989. In 1848, the ethnic melting pot that was the Habsburg Empire exploded under the pressure of nationalism. Germans against Poles, Magyars against Czechs, Czechs against Slovaks: the number of actual and potential ethnic and national conflicts ran into double figures. Many of the same conflicts were being replayed in 1989, with the added complication of state boundaries mostly established in 1918. The case of the Hungarians alone, with large minorities in Transylvania (Romania), Slovakia (Czechoslovakia), and Vojvodina (Yugoslavia), indicates the scale of the national problem.<sup>56</sup> Not its least intransigent expression was the national question within the Soviet Union itself, inspired both by the internal reform movement and by the example of the East European revolutions beyond Soviet boundaries. The nationalist demands of the Baltic republics and of Georgia, Moldavia, Ukraine, and even Russia, show how possible it might have been for the Soviet Union to go the way of the Habsburg Empire in 1848 and again in 1918.<sup>57</sup>

1848 opened up not just nationalism, but the class struggle. Both Tocqueville and Marx, in their different ways, wrote eloquently about that. What the class struggle—otherwise known as “the social question”—revealed was the possible contradiction between political and economic justice. In 1989 and since, the echoes of this have been strong throughout Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union. The workers may not have had much love for the old regimes, but they have been accustomed to a certain, quite considerable, degree of economic and social security. The move from a command economy to a market economy, which was necessary for political as much as economic reasons as the social basis of liberalism, was bound to upset that security.<sup>58</sup>

Writing of the 1848 revolution in France, Marx said that “the February Revolution was the beautiful revolution, the revolution of universal sympathy.” The June Revolution was, by contrast, “the ugly revolution, the repulsive revolution.” It was the point at which the social conflicts hidden beneath the harmony of the February revolution broke through and set Frenchman against Frenchman on the barricades.<sup>59</sup> However, analogies should not be pushed to their extremes. A “June Days” revolution, in that form, is unlikely in Eastern Europe. But the dangers remain. Certainly once the honeymoon period of Civic Forum, New Forum, Democratic Forum, and all the other opposition movements of citizens was over, the underlying economic conflicts were bound to surface.

1848 was the year of the “failed bourgeois revolutions.” Liberalism and constitutionalism suffered severe defeats, and the result was a different direction for such societies as Germany and Italy. What greater chance of success had the bourgeois revolutions of 1989, if they were to pick up the legacy of those earlier revolutions? The societies of Eastern Europe were attempting the transition both to a pluralist democracy and to a market economy. In the conditions in which they find themselves, with traditions that are shaky on both counts, this is clearly a formidable challenge. What resources are there to meet the challenge? What are the alternatives in Eastern Europe?

## **Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy**

After the revolutions of 1989 it was clear that the international context was likely to be of major importance in determining the future of Eastern Europe. Whether the former communist countries would join the European Economic Community; whether a new and larger federal Europe—from the Atlantic to the Urals?—could be designed to include its eastern and western halves; whether the West would invest on a large scale in Eastern Europe: all these would clearly have a profound, though indeterminate, impact on the economies and societies of the new states.

At a different level, and with even less predictable consequences, was the issue of the end of the Cold War. At the Paris meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in November 1990, President Gorbachev spoke in ringing tones of “the chance of building a hitherto unknown world order.” The Soviet Union, he said, was becoming a

state “anchored in the rule of law and political pluralism.” Nothing then fundamentally prevented a “united democratic and prosperous Europe” from becoming an “irreversible reality in the coming century.” But he warned, too, of the possibilities of the “Balkanization”—or, even worse, “Lebanonization”—of entire regions of the continent.<sup>60</sup>

Because the international arena is the least stable environment— witness the Gulf War— within which to make predictions and projections, I shall say no more here about these hopes and fears. Nor, too, shall I make any attempt to compare “the transition to democracy” in Central and Eastern Europe with what are often said to be similar transitions in southern Europe, South America, and Southeast Asia (not to mention the “denazification” of several Western European states in the postwar period). The parallels are certainly there, and they can be instructive. To consider Spain and Portugal, say, or Chile and Argentina, or South Korea and the Philippines, along with Poland and Hungary, is to be made aware of similar traditions of authoritarianism and militarism that may pose similar problems in the attempts to achieve democracy. And there have also been certain uniformities in the mode of opposition, and in the role of religion in that opposition, in many of these countries.<sup>61</sup>

At the same time, the different historical experiences of these countries and continents limit the usefulness of the comparison. It is, indeed, difficult enough to generalize about Eastern Europe on its own without adding the complication of further comparisons. Moreover, as Ralf Dahrendorf has pointed out, there is one important respect in which Eastern Europe differs fundamentally from these other countries. In none of these others was there the same near-total monopoly of a party over state, economy, and society, making the three “almost indistinguishable” in the communist world. Elsewhere there was authoritarian dictatorship with more or less thriving “unsocial market economies.” This affects the scale of the change achieved by the different revolutions. As Dahrendorf has said, “The Portuguese ‘revolution of carnations’ may sound as appealing as the Czechoslovak ‘velvet revolution,’ but in fact the notion of revolution is much more applicable to Eastern Europe, where the all-encompassing claims of the ruling *nomenklatura* had to be broken.”<sup>62</sup>

The future of Eastern Europe will turn to a good extent on its own internal resources, on the traditions and practices of the various countries now seeking an independent path forward. East Germany is already committed to sharing the destiny of West Germany, with whatever painful experiences, along with the benefits, will accompany the merger. Elsewhere the answers to two sets of questions might throw some light on future outcomes. First, what are the conceptions of politics that are dominant in the outlook of the leaders of the new regimes? With what resources of experience and ideas do they come to their tasks? Second, how completely have the East European states converted to the idea of the market, or of capitalism? Can their future simply be described as the more or less wholesale absorption of capitalist values and practices? What, if anything, is left of socialism?

It has been impossible to ignore, in the writings by and about the East European opposition, the revival of the language of “civil society” and “citizenship.” This is for Eastern Europe, says Dahrendorf, “the hour of the citizen.” “1989,” says Garton Ash, “was the springtime of societies aspiring to be civil.... The language of citizenship was important in all these revolutions.”<sup>63</sup> By “civil society” in this context is meant not so much—as in the usual Marxist use of the term—the sphere of the private, nonpolitical life of citizens, but rather their associational life in their professional, civic, and other voluntary organizations. Use of the term “civil society” in this sense—Hegelian and Gramscian—is an attempt to define an alternative realm of the political, a realm that is neither of the party nor of the state, nor, at the same time, is it confined to the concerns of the private life of individuals. It is in the active, educative life of these associations, mediating between the state and the individual, that the politics of citizenship will be sought.<sup>64</sup>

A conception of this sort, with variations, has of course long been the theoretical underpinning of some prominent views of pluralist democracy in the West. It goes back to Montesquieu and Madison, to Burke and Tocqueville and Durkheim, and has been popular with many American and British social scientists.<sup>65</sup> Its fruitfulness in the case of Western societies is not the issue here, nor even its notorious vagueness. What is more problematic is how far it can be realistically applied to the conditions of East European societies. For one of the things repeatedly stressed in the accounts of those societies

under communist rule was the more or less total destruction of civil society. In what Václav Havel calls the “post-totalitarian” states of the communist world, society had been atomized, individuals cowed and driven back into private life. The prevailing attitudes toward politics were despair, cynicism, apathy, indifference, and resignation: hardly the qualities to sustain a thriving civic culture.<sup>66</sup> “Voluntary” associations, civic and cultural, were mostly shams, fronts for party control of areas of life where a policy of indirect rule might be preferred to one of direct rule.

It is true that what Adam Michnik calls the strategy of “social selforganization” or “social self-defense” for the reconstitution of civil society has scored some notable successes. Poland is the best example, with the birth of the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR) in 1976 and Solidarity in 1980.<sup>67</sup> But Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, the “democratic opposition” in Hungary (also launched in 1977), and the numerous citizens’ forums created everywhere in the opposition movement leading up to 1989 have shown many of the same characteristics as their Polish counterparts: wide-ranging activities including *samizdat* publishing, trade union organization, and ceaseless political discussion in the workplace, in schools and universities, and anywhere else where the party could be evaded or, increasingly, ignored.

But what has been the fate of these agencies of “social selforganization”? Solidarity, the most spectacular example, was badly split. The civic forums elsewhere also dissolved with the onset of power, or have been pushed aside by other forces. In the 1990 elections the East German New Forum received only 2.9 percent of the vote. In Hungary the Democratic Opposition, which organized the main liberal opposition to Kadarism, was defeated by its more conservative rivals, the Democratic Forum, in the elections of March 1990. In both cases previously loose alliances of opposition groups crystalized into formal political parties. In Czechoslovakia, the Civic Forum indeed swept all before it in the elections of 1990. But in the face of mounting instability and constitutional crisis the harmony of the opposition movement has been shattered. Vaclav Klaus, the finance minister and chairman of Civic Forum, declared that the future of the Civic Forum must be as a “rightwing political party.” President Václav Havel, the outstanding symbol of the new politics of nonparty civic opposition, somewhat reluctantly endorsed this view. “The idea of an overwhelming public movement is over,” he said.<sup>68</sup>

Everywhere civic associations have been prominent in the period of opposition in the struggle to overthrow the party state. They have been virtual models of democratic, peaceful protest. But, once successful in achieving the immediate goal—the removal of Communist Party rule—they have largely disintegrated. They have been phenomena of extraordinary revolutionary politics; with the onset of ordinary politics they have shown that they lack the capacity to sustain themselves.

This is no shame. It is surely what we should expect. Given the history of *gleichschaltung* in these countries in the last forty years, it is quite extraordinary what they have managed to achieve. Clearly there were spaces, after all, in the totalitarian society. But this is a far different matter from developing the habits and practices that constitute the politics of civil society. Leaving aside the five centuries or so that Norbert Elias allots to the “civilizing process” in Western Europe, we can note that even in T. H. Marshall’s more restricted concept of citizenship in Britain the acceptance of the idea, and its imperfect realization, took about three centuries.<sup>69</sup> The United States had rather less time, though the institutions of the colonial period provided a good starting point. In any case, as Dahrendorf points out, the strength of pluralist democracy in America comes not so much from its age as from the fact that “civil society was there first, and the state came later, by the grace of civil society, as it were.”<sup>70</sup> In the case of Eastern Europe what has to be contemplated is, in effect, the creation of civil society by the state. In the absence of the necessary intermediate structures, the new regimes will deliberately have to institute autonomous centers of power that will act as a check on their own power. This is a formidable task. Few new states have been successful in it.

It has to be said that the task will not, on the whole, be helped by the political ideas that are being brought to it by many of the new leaders of Eastern Europe. The absence of a functioning civil society, of an independent sphere of public opinion, has produced, as its intellectual counterpart, a conception of politics that deliberately and defiantly turns its back on practical politics. This is the “anti-political politics” that we have already noted in the writings of Václav Havel. György Konrád, another influential advocate of this philosophy, states its basic position in the clearest terms:

Antipolitics and government work in two different dimensions, two separate spheres. Antipolitics neither supports nor opposes governments; it is something different. ... A society does not become politically conscious when it shares some political philosophy, but rather when it refuses to be fooled by any one of them.... Because politics has flooded nearly every nook and cranny of our lives, I would like to see the flood recede. We ought to depoliticize our lives, free them from politics as from some contagious infection.... Official premises belong to the state, homes to “society.” Home and free time: these are the spatial and temporal dimensions of civic independence.... We are not trying primarily to conquer institutions and shape them in our image but to expand the bounds of private existence.<sup>71</sup>

Konrád may stress the privateness of antipolitics more than other East European intellectuals. But he is at one with them in seeing antipolitics as a separate sphere from ordinary politics. Politics is the Machiavellian sphere of power; antipolitics is the sphere of the mind and spirit. It is the quintessential realm of the intellectuals—the intellectuals who made the revolutions of 1989. The intellectuals are the universal class, the bearers of internationalism and world culture. To the power of the state they oppose the “authority of the spirit.” They do not seek political power, nor do they foment strikes and revolutions. They exercise influence indirectly, “by changing a society’s customary thinking patterns and tacit compacts.”<sup>72</sup>

Václav Havel’s powerful account of what he takes to be the only worthwhile kind of politics echoes this conception. For him, antipolitics is “politics as practical morality, as service to the truth, as essentially human ... care for our fellow humans.” It is the politics of the powerless, a politics that opposes truth and morality, even when uttered only by a single voice, to an oppressive system that cannot be challenged by any other means. This might make it sound a politics of last resort, a politics of despair. This is not, at least, Havel’s view of it. Out of the Czech people’s predicament, out of the whole historical experience of Central Europe, there has emerged a more fundamental understanding of politics than is available to those living in traditional democracies or traditional dictatorships. The experience of “post-totalitarian” systems has forced people to go back

to the roots of politics to understand its existential basis. This is a politics beyond parties and movements, beyond even those courageous movements of opposition that arose in Eastern Europe. It is a “living within the truth,” within the natural realm of “the existential and the pre-political,” whose elemental forces of truth and morality are the weapons to use against the “automatism” and ideology of the political system—any political system. “Living within the truth” confronts “living within a lie” and so exposes the system at its core.<sup>73</sup>

Looking to the future, Havel says:

People who live in the post-totalitarian system know only too well that the question of whether one or several political parties are in power, and how these parties define and label themselves, is of far less importance than the question of whether or not it is possible to live like a human being. ... A genuine, profound and lasting change for the better ... can no longer result from the victory ... of any particular traditional conception, which can ultimately be only external, that is, a structural or systemic conception. More than ever before, such a change will have to derive from human existence, from the fundamental reconstitution of the position of people in the world, their relationships to themselves and to each other, and to the universe. If a better economic and political model is to be created, then perhaps more than ever before it must derive from profound existential and moral changes in society.<sup>74</sup>

It is true that this was written more than ten years before the 1989 revolution. But there are many more recent similar expressions, by Havel as well as others.<sup>75</sup> If there was a political philosophy to the 1989 revolution in Eastern Europe, it seems to have been made up of elements of this antipolitical politics. As a political philosophy, of the kind discussed in academic seminars, it is perhaps not very original, but it is expressed with depth and feeling. As a testament of the dissident intellectuals of Eastern Europe, it is profoundly moving. More than that, its categories pose a challenge to all existing political systems, Western as well as Eastern.

That is perhaps its greatest problem. One has to ask not how true or attractive its terms are, but how adequate they are to the task facing the new rulers. A political philosophy that is a blanket rejection of all existing forms of politics is all very well for a revolutionary theorist or academic philosopher, but it does not very well equip politicians with an urgent job of reconstruction in front of them. They need to dirty themselves with the business of winning support, building alliances, conciliating old enemies, holding together societies that threaten to split apart under the pressure of class, ethnicity, and nationalism.

The experience of the new rulers has largely been of dissident politics: a politics carried out through *samizdat* publications, covert meetings in private apartments, letters and articles smuggled out of prison and published abroad, quasi-conspiratorial organization. It is the politics of intellectuals who, like the men of 1848, now find themselves, to their own surprise, in power. Like the revolutionaries of 1848, they are threatened on all sides by more seasoned political forces.

There are atavistic nationalists, authoritarian populists, cynical and resentful old-guard conservatives. All of these have large constituencies, based on long-standing traditions and practices, in the mass of the population. The liberals will in most cases have to forge new constituencies, among populations with little experience of, and perhaps not much taste for, liberal democracy.<sup>76</sup>

The politics of truth and authenticity can be a great inspiration. Without it politics can degenerate into mere power seeking and manipulation. But its very sublimity disables it as a guide to the practical problems of the day. Currently what East European politics needs is less of Rousseau and the moral or existential revolution and more of Jeremy Bentham and the politics of practical reconstruction.

There is a final point to be made, one that brings us back to the “death of socialism” and the many other alleged fatalities connected with it. Probably the surest way to stifle liberal democracy in Eastern Europe at birth is the rapid wholesale introduction of market capitalism. Poland may already be an early casualty, with the workers turning to Lech Walesa as the strong leader to save them from some of the consequences of the Balcerowicz plan inspired by the International Monetary Fund (despite Walesa’s own

clear complicity in the development of the plan). The truth is that, despite the rhetoric of some of the new office holders, there is little evidence that the populations of Eastern Europe have turned their backs on all types and every type of socialism.

The unexpected electoral victory in Hungary of the Democratic Forum over the Alliance of Free Democrats has been plausibly attributed to the Free Democrats' "almost messianic commitment to radical free-market policies" compared with the more cautious approach of their rivals.<sup>77</sup> In the June 1990 elections in Czechoslovakia, the only country in postrevolutionary Eastern Europe where the Communist Party has defiantly refused to "dilute" its name, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia remarkably received a consistent 13 percent of the vote in almost every region in the country, beating the well-fancied Christian Democrats into third place. It is also clear that the Civic Forum is badly split between those, such as Václav Klaus and Pavel Bratinka, who want a quick transition to a market economy and those, such as Václav Havel and Petr Uhl, who are opposed to "unadorned capitalism" and who have protested against those members of the government who, in Havel's words, are "more Friedmanite than Friedman."<sup>78</sup> In Romania and Bulgaria, rearguard communists, though renouncing their former name, continue to battle for public support; and their success in the 1990 elections in their two countries has generally been accepted as genuine, reflecting either actual support for their policies or at least a disinclination to trust the free-market promises of their liberal opponents. The East Germans have opted for the capitalist paradise of union with West Germany; but the devastating effect of the market on the East German economy and society has already made some former dissidents—not to mention many ordinary workers—look back with nostalgia to at least certain aspects of the old German Democratic Republic.<sup>79</sup>

In the wake of forty years of communist domination and political stagnation, it is hardly surprising if *communism* and even *socialism* are now dirty words in the vocabulary of most parts of Eastern Europe. This may not turn out to be permanent. The dislocations inevitably involved in the conversion to a capitalist economy—assuming that this is the goal—are bound to stimulate the rise of political groupings of the kind we traditionally associate with social democracy in Western Europe. Misha Glenny's assessment seems more accurate than the many pronouncements of radical free marketeers in both East and West: "Conservatives in both West and East have ... been dancing on what they believe

to be the graves of socialism in Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia and Belgrade. This makes for excellent theatre, but the left's demise is an illusion. As large parts of the population are being adversely affected by the introduction of new economic conditions, they will have to find ways to defend their interests and improve their situation, which is in many cases quite pitiful.”<sup>80</sup>

What, in any case, is meant by the phrase *the transition to the free market* in Eastern Europe? What kind of free market? Is it the kind that obtains in the majority of contemporary capitalist societies, including the most successful economically, such as Germany and Japan? Because, if so, as John Kenneth Galbraith is fond of pointing out, this is a “free market” only in name. Capitalism has survived only because it has undergone massive transformation. Crucially, it has come to accept, indeed to promote, a powerful structure of regulation and, in the interests of social peace, a large measure of social welfare. Capitalism in the West and in Japan—and, one might add, the dynamic industrializing states of Southeast Asia—is state-regulated capitalism. It would be a cruel irony if, in their bid to imitate successful Western models, East Europeans allowed themselves to be trapped by the “simplistic ideology” of early industrial capitalism despite its continuing celebration by its more devout theologians in the West. As Galbraith says: “Those who speak, as so many do so glibly, even mindlessly, of a return to the Smithian free market are wrong to the point of a mental vacuity of clinical proportions. It is something in the West we do not have, would not tolerate, could not survive. Ours is a mellow, government-protected life; for Eastern Europeans pure and rigorous capitalism would be no more welcome than it would be for us.”<sup>81</sup>

“We say there is no third way. There is no credible alternative between western capitalism and Eastern socialism.” So declared a leading member of Hungary's Free Democrats to Timothy Garton Ash.<sup>82</sup> This may be, in a general sense, a fair way of putting it; but it may also be too general, too abstract a formulation. It fails to suggest the variety of the social forms of capitalism. There is a capitalist economic system, now more or less global in its operations, and there are different kinds of capitalist societies. Sweden is capitalist, no doubt, but its welfare system and its policies of redistribution put it at some distance from the capitalist society of the United States. Even if, as seems clear, East Europeans—or at least their leaders—are bent on establishing or restoring

some form of capitalist market economy, the manner, timing, and eventual goal of their efforts allow considerable room for choice and debate. Not only must East Europeans, as Adam Michnik has warned, beware of replacing a “utopian socialism” with a “utopian capitalism,” a free-market utopia;<sup>83</sup> they must also see that the alternatives in Eastern Europe, however dominated by Western models, can be cast far wider than they currently appear to imagine.

This is not necessarily to smuggle the “third way” in again through the back door. Despite the hopes of certain intellectuals, often those involved in the “new social movements” of East and West, most East European societies (the countries of the former Soviet Union apart) seem to have set themselves firmly on a course toward capitalism.<sup>84</sup> If the third way is regarded as a full-blooded alternative to both “socialism” and “capitalism”—if it is conceived, that is, as a different kind of social system—not only do we lack a coherent account of what it is, but—and perhaps partly for that reason—it is doubtful if it would presently receive any substantial political support from the populations of the East European societies. Time may change this; but for the moment the third way, as a political project, is a pipe dream.

This talk of a third way, the third way as an alternative system, in any case obscures a more important and more relevant consideration. If capitalism is our future for the time being, how are we to think about that capitalism? How are we to live with it, criticize it, challenge its terms, and monitor its progress? Capitalism, to repeat, is not one thing, but many. It has changed greatly over the past two hundred years, and will go on changing. It has coexisted with many social and political forms, some brutal and repressive, some tolerant and democratic. It has spawned, as a “counterculture,” some of the most energetic and creative social and cultural movements of the modern period. Whether or not they aimed to overthrow it, they have succeeded in modifying it and redirecting its energies in countless ways. There may be no ideological terminus to capitalism; or, at least, if there is one, it may not be the right thing to be concerned about at the moment. But there is plenty to do in the meantime by way of the constant struggle to civilize capitalism.

Capitalism can, as the many courageous efforts in the past have demonstrated, be made to be more compassionate, more democratic, more responsive to the spiritual and moral needs of individuals. It can be forced to see the necessity of working with rather than against nature. If the attempts to regulate it in this way ultimately kill it off, so be it. By that time we may have come up with something more acceptable to replace it. It may even be called socialism. But that is for a future now some way off. This is the time to be alerted to the problems and possibilities within “actually existing capitalism,” the system that, now more clearly than ever before, encircles the globe. “Socialism with a human face” may not now have many followers; it is even more important, in the period of capitalism’s unrivaled dominance, to make sure that we give capitalism a human face.

This is why one aspect of the 1989 revolutions can seem particularly dispiriting. The victory of the West, of Western political ideals and economic institutions, has had as one of its effects the obliteration of all sense of the differences and divisions that lie within and between societies of the Western type. It is a familiar experience in the history of wars and revolutions. So appalled are people at the monstrosities of one system that, in the relief of being rid of it, they can see the alternative system only in its most resplendent guise. They perceive the gross or general features, the system as type or genus, and are blind or indifferent to the differentiating details that constitute the variety or species. They ignore or look benignly upon the defects of the system as the pardonable faults of an otherwise satisfactory and in any case infinitely preferable social existence. They become, in its defense, *plus royaliste que le roi*, scornful or incredulous of criticisms. Both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries have throughout the ages appealed to so natural a feeling at times of social crisis and heightened emotion.

It is natural, but can be baleful. In embracing the Western model so wholeheartedly, the revolutionaries of 1989 have not only caused a certain amount of disquiet—to put it no more strongly—among radicals in the West. More important, they have aroused a chorus of Western triumphalism that threatens to drown all criticism, all sense of alternatives, within the prevailing capitalist mode. “It is striking,” as Fred Halliday has remarked, “how, amidst the triumph of consumer capitalism and the collapse of ‘communism’ the possibility of aberrations is now being submerged in the name of a new international political and cultural conformity: all aspire to, and supposedly endorse, a composite

transnational utopia, distilled from, and defined by, the lifestyles of California, Rheinland-Westfalen and Surrey. That this new utopia contains profound structures of inequality, defined on class, sex, race and regional bases, is evident, but repressed in most prevailing public discourses.”<sup>85</sup> Socialism is dead, chorus the pundits. To which one might fairly reply that, though Stalinist communism may have had its day (though any such prediction is foolhardy), socialism has yet to see its day. But that is, by the way, the sort of remark that many find evasive or frivolous (as with analogous remarks about Christianity). The more important point has to do with socialism not as an alternative to capitalism, but as its most formidable and searching antagonist. Zygmunt Bauman has pointed to socialism’s function as the “active utopia” of modern times. It has been the “counterculture of capitalism,” the philosophy and political movement that throughout has reminded capitalism of the universalism of its promise and has kept up a relentless critique of its practices.<sup>86</sup> That function continues, and must continue, unabated, the more so now that “actually existing socialism” has ceased to be able to perform it. This suggests a continuing role not just for socialism, but also for utopia.<sup>87</sup>

And was 1989 “the end of history”? Several commentators have pointed out that, whatever the verdict may be for the West or the world as a whole, so far as Eastern Europe is concerned the revolutions of 1989 signify not the end, but “the rebirth of history.” Eastern Europe is returning to its past, to the point where its evolution was frozen some forty years ago, in order to resume “its proper history.”<sup>88</sup> This claim has to be treated with some caution: what or when was Eastern Europe’s “proper history”? But the point has force nevertheless. It reminds us once again of the variety of choices facing the societies of Eastern Europe. The artificial uniformity imposed by membership of the Soviet-dominated “Eastern bloc” has ended. The generic “people’s democracies” are rediscovering their own independent histories. They will make their own futures—insofar as any country can in an increasingly interlinked world—according to whatever values and traditions they choose to recover from their past.

In doing so, they may also kick-start the stalled engine of history in the West. Most East Europeans have seen the recovery of their history as a “return to Europe,” to quote the Civic Forum’s election manifesto issued in June 1990. Again, the vexed questions arise: What is Europe, Which Europe? But there is also another point, forcibly put by Václav

Havel on several occasions. To return to Europe does not mean to return to Europe's past or even to its present. Neither of these alternatives, in truth, has much to offer Central and Eastern Europe. To return to Europe must therefore mean to play a part in building a new Europe. It must mean joining in the creation of a common future. As Havel says, "To ponder our return means for us to ponder a whole Europe, to ponder the Europe of the future."<sup>89</sup>

Does this not also suggest that the impact of the 1989 revolutions will not be restricted to Eastern Europe but will have profound consequences for the politics of the West as well? Edward Thompson has referred to "the spaces of opportunity" opened up by developments in Eastern Europe. He regrets the failure so far of "the Western peace movement and progressive forces" to "hasten on reciprocal process in the West to match the decomposition of Cold War ideological controls in the East."<sup>90</sup> But it is not only radical politics that may be affected by the momentous events in the East. The whole structure of politics, the whole cast of thought, in the West (as in the East) has for the past forty years—perhaps even the past seventy years—been conditioned by Cold War fear and rivalry. The West and its ways may have won that war; but take away the fear and rivalry, and will history be content to slumber, as after a task already done?